

DROWNING IN DREAMS

By: Pagan/KellyB

SUMMARY: Pieces of Anakin's life from the end of TPM up to ANH - mostly centered on and around Padme and Shmi and the importance of his dreams and visions played in his life. A little bit of Padme's POV included.

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TITLE: Drowning in Dreams

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DATE: Summer 2004 to Winter 2006

SUMMARY: Bits and pieces of Anakin's life from the end of The Phantom Menace up until the beginning of A New Hope - mostly centered on and around Padme and Shmi and the importance his dreams and visions played in his life. A little bit of Padme's point of view is also included.

TIME PERIOD: End of TPM to the beginning of ANH.

TYPE: Angst/Dark/Drama/Romance - Character study.

RATING: R

WARNINGS: This isn't warm and fuzzy Anakin/Padme. Het/Minor/Lime/Minimal OFC encounters.

DISCLAIMER: I'm just a simple woman trying to make my way in the universe. I intend no infringement on the Lucasfilm characters, situations, or storylines. I'm making absolutely NO money off of this so suing would really be pointless, George dear. This rendering is merely for the titillation of rabid Star Wars fans like me who have WAY too much time on their hands. Bless us one and all.

CRITIQUE: Constructive criticism and comments welcomed - I'll hear whatever you have to say. Please respond to kellyb701@hotmail.com

ARCHIVE: Sure, just let me know where so I can visit.

Part One – It Begins

*"Dreams are sweet,
But better flowers are growing at your feet.
If you crush, or pass unheeding, idle friend,
You shall answer for their ruin in the end."*

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Anakin - Ages 10-14

Padme embraces him before he leaves Naboo, a haunting echo of the final farewell with his beloved mother. Slender arms encircle him and draw him in. His hot face burrows into the soft curve of her neck and shoulder, and he sighs into her unbound hair. For a split second he's back under the burning glare of the Tatooine suns, pressed against the rough work dress adorning his mother and reveling in his last taste of home. But the expected comforting smell of cooking fires and musky feminine sweat isn't there, instead his senses fill with the light fragrance of fragile flowers and scented flesh, and a new memory is mapped. A forever sense of

welcome and rightness, of future and hope is born and comes to rest in the corner of his mind reserved solely for this haunting creature of beauty.

All too soon it's over and she's releasing him, telling him in her low, musical voice how she will never forget him and that he must promise her that he will study hard and become a Jedi.

While she talks she plays with the piece of japor he carved for her, the one he gave her to insure she would not forget him. He watches her delicate fingers with their manicured nails, mesmerized by the way they absently turn the wooden pendant end over end as a rushing stream tumbles a stone. If he concentrates on that action instead of these unwelcome goodbyes maybe his heart will stop constricting so painfully within the cage of his chest. Perhaps the tears pricking the insides of his eyelids will not fall.

"Be good, Ani."

Her words are final as if she thinks they will never meet again and for a moment he allows doubt to creep in and darken his thoughts. Didn't she remember what he told her when they first met? And then a more disturbing thought, what if it was just a fanciful dream after all? What if his vision of the future was somehow wrong?

"I'm going to marry you."

The image explodes in his head anew, as bright as any supernova and just as brilliantly clear, and then he knows it wasn't his imagination, knows she does indeed belong to him. But he's only ten and the words, the confidence it takes to say them and be believed, aren't there yet, so he ducks his head and mumbles his shy farewells like any other boy would do. Except he's not a normal boy, he never has been and he never will be.

He's only half aware of the place inside him where something - a feeling, an idea, a truth - begins to take shape, to coalesce and form. A longing rises up, bittersweet and sharp in the back of his throat, and his heart clenches once more. He isn't ready to either accept or even comprehend the kaleidoscope of emotions welling up inside so he shies away from the alien feelings in favor of just being a child for a little while longer.

The little boy shuns the beast, but the part of him that enjoys tearing things apart to see how they work, the part that enjoys a challenge, stores away these rather bewildering sensations in order to examine them later at leisure. Then every memory will be carefully revisited, every feeling relived. They will become the mental building blocks in the foundation of his ever growing fascination with Padme. It is this past time which will cement the obsession born on that otherwise ordinary day in Watto's shop, an obsession which will guide him one way or another until the day he dies.

In the end the hardest part is walking away. Doing it once was bad enough, twice is pure agony. When he turned away from his mother on the dusty road leading out of Mos Espa, he did so with the knowledge of a similar pair of brown eyes waiting for him at the other end. It was the thought of Padme which kept him moving forward and following in Qui Gon's wake that day. Not the desire to be a Jedi, not the idea of finally being free from a life of slavery. Somehow those all-important dreams had been supplanted by the recalled sensation of a soft palm slipping into his calloused grasp, the feel of slender fingers curling around his as she followed where he led.

He tries not to look back but he fails because this time he is not going towards her, but away.

She stands there, dressed once more in her handmaiden attire but looking every inch the queen, and he wonders how they never saw it all that time. There is no ancient blood lineage linking her to the throne but her spirit is royal and pure, and it radiates from her like a beacon. Doubts slink in again to whisper words of unworthiness and a cold chill spirals through him.

Padme sees him freeze half way up the ship's ramp and an encouraging smile starts to turn up the corners of her mouth as their eyes meet. Suddenly it's just like it was in Watto's shop for that blinding moment, that second in time when he told her he wasn't always going to be a little boy, and the fourteen year old girl's poise begins to crumble and wilt. Once more, Padme Amidala finds herself undone by a boy barely ten years of age.

The wordless cry fills the invisible void between them. He isn't any more aware of projecting it than she is cognizant of where it originates. The connection is just there, they both sense it, they both feel it, and it cements something in Anakin, while at the same time it unsettles Padme so much she drops the japor pendant without realizing it.

Dark and light. Overpowering and undeniable. Threatening and comforting. A potent mix of emotions flows back and forth like an electric current, raising the tiny hairs on the back of her neck and sending icy hot prickles of sensation through her frame. She feels as if she is standing on the brink of a yawning chasm and is about to topple forward. A sudden sense of hopeless inevitability, of losing absolute control of her fate, nearly yanks her off her feet. The air squeezes from her lungs, making her light headed as a nameless panic rises up like a demon from the nightmares of her childhood. A specter looms over her, faceless, yet hideous and malevolent in its intangibility. It puts into shadow all her previous fears, mocking them as childish and insignificant in comparison.

Only Obi Wan's unwitting intervention brings it to an end. The Jedi comes back down the ramp with an impatient air and nudges his charge, gesturing for the boy to follow, which Anakin finally does with one last look at the girl standing motionless across the hangar. He swallows his fear and uncertainty, turning from the person he has subconsciously made his emotional touchstone, to follow the man who will shape his future in lieu of the one who fell before his time.

Padme breathes again only when the ramp closes. The relief washing through her so palatable it makes her nauseous. She cares for the oddly charming little boy who helped save her world but . . . there is something there, something which worries her too. If she were truthful with herself, she would admit it was more a premonition of fear than anything else, but common sense and practicality overrule the fanciful thought even as a heavy wave of dizziness takes her.

It is Sab who retrieves the wooden pendant from where it lays forgotten on the ground. The queen is unwell.

Coruscant is completely different from Tatooine. He notices it more this time than last because now he is here to stay. Now it is his home. The knowledge both exhilarates and frightens him all at once.

On the city planet nature has been obliterated; even the weather is created and controlled by man. Looming building after building stretch as far as the eye can see. From the air the sprawling towers look rather menacing, like thousands of metal fingers intent upon clawing

viciously at the sky, ready to swat incoming ships from the air.

Everything is hard lines and smooth surfaces, metal and transparisteel, artificial and gleaming. Men and women, droids, creatures of all shapes and sizes, are crowded in on each other with seemingly little room to move or breathe or stretch out their arms and just spin. He misses the wide open spaces around Mos Espa, the solitude and silence of the endless desert. Most of all he misses his mother.

At times he even misses the old Toydarian and his cluttered junk shop. Maybe that's why he fills his and Obi Wan's apartment at the Temple with every spare bit of machinery he can get his hands on. It makes it feel a little more like home.

Those first few months he dreams about sand, of all things; sand, oil, dirt, and hot metal - the components that made up the aroma of Watto's shop. Shmi smiles at him, her face tired and worn but so loved. In these dreams he forgets they are slaves, forgets about Watto. He is with his mother and he is happy. There is a touch on his arm and he knows who it is without turning to look. But he turns anyway, how could he not? Padme is there just as she was the first time he saw her, not in the guise of either queen or fancy handmaiden, but as a simple girl. Contentment and peace spread through him, a new but wonderful feeling. He is complete here.

He wakes and wishes he had not.

The days are filled with lessons upon lessons. He learns and absorbs all he is taught and hungers for more; he always wants more. The newest Padawan excels at every task he is given but it seems it is never enough. No matter how well he does Anakin never really feels fully accepted. They don't think he hears the whispers or sees the looks always being exchanged. He's neither blind nor stupid and he would have to be both to not notice the pinched mouths and disapproving glances constantly being cast his way.

Too old.

Too full of fear.

Too dangerous.

He hasn't cried since the first week at the Temple and he is determined to never do so again. Strength is drawn from his love for the two women he holds in his heart, his secret talismans. He strives desperately to make them both so proud. He will become a Jedi to free his mother and to prove to Padme he is good enough for a queen.

Solace is found in the Temple Gardens. It reminds him of Naboo. It reminds him of the world and life he wants for his mother. The free time he is allowed is spent in exploration and it is here where he feels soft, green grass between his bare toes for the first time. It is here where he learns the delights of cool water on hot skin for the sake of pleasure alone.

Lying on his back in a clearing he naively thinks he is the first to discover, Anakin dreams of showing the gardens to his mother and Padme someday. He sees himself in his Jedi robes, lightsaber hanging at his side, hard and heavy against his thigh as he escorts them along paths meandering through the blooms and exotic plants. He sees their delighted smiles and can hear their murmurs of appreciation. He can feel his mother's arm through his and Padme's warm hand curled over his other.

It is not all fun and daydreams however. The gardens don't tend themselves and Anakin is put to work.

Gardening is an alien concept to a boy from a desert planet but he spends time working the soil and it is not long before he begins to like the feel of black dirt beneath his fingernails. He learns some plants take a long time to establish themselves in their new homes while others, mostly unwelcome weeds, are quicker to send their shoots deep in the soil and push out the desired flowers. He imagines a war waged beneath the surface of the deceptively tranquil garden, a battleground where competing root systems vie for food, water, and space. When the offending plants are ripped from their beds by the Temple gardeners he thinks he can hear them scream.

What does the Order see him as, he wonders, a desired cutting to be nurtured and accepted or as a loathsome weed to be torn by its roots and summarily discarded from hallowed ground?

Anakin thinks of them both every day, Shmi and Padme. Images of them are jumbled in his head now, intertwined so much that sorting them out is impossible. He doesn't stop to wonder why this is so. He doesn't try to examine why the mother who loved and raised him for almost ten years shares equal time with a girl he knew for just over a month. It's just how it is and he accepts it without question.

They aren't lost on him, the similarities - the traits they share. In his eyes they are equally beautiful with their warm brown eyes and dark hair. Sad smiles light their faces and worry shadows their expressions even as they square their shoulders in preparation for another impossible day. He is drawn to that very strength and goodness, and when he leaves one woman, it is really only to find the same qualities in the other.

The ghost touch of warm fingertips feather across his forehead and he doesn't know whom he is remembering. It could be his mother checking to see if a fever has left him or it could be Padme brushing the hair from his eyes as Obi Wan cuts it in the style of a Jedi Padawan. The past bleeds together and most times he cannot tell the mother from the girl or the girl from the mother.

In the beginning Anakin lives on the foolish hope there might be a chance to see Padme. For a time he even thinks it only a matter of waiting just one more day. And then another. And then another. Eventually, his hope dies a slow and painful death. There are no visits. There are no communications. There is only silence.

If she visits Coruscant it is while he is away on some mission. Suspicions form that the Order arranges it this way, that as soon as it is known the Naboo delegation is coming he and his Master are conveniently sent on some off world assignment. Resentment takes root and he

nurtures it, guarding it jealously because it's his hurt and he doesn't want to share it with the very people whom he blames for creating it.

The ripples in the Force do not go unnoticed. In a culture where attachments are forbidden, Anakin's unfortunate affection for the young queen continues to be noted and quietly, but actively, discouraged.

Not a day can pass without thoughts of Padme infiltrating his mind. During his waking hours he often loses himself in a world of daydreams which have nothing to do with meditating or Jedi history or practicing his fighting technique. When he is supposed to be finding his center and conditioning his muscles through graceful katas repetitions, he is instead concentrating on the memory of a pair of curved lips and hearing the remnants of her sweet voice calling his name. More times than he can count he feels the painful rap of Master Yoda's glimmer stick or receives a blistering dressing down from a long suffering Obi Wan.

Anakin takes each punishment without complaint, oblivious to a reality which can't possibly compare to the fantastical future he is building with Padme in his head. The Jedi can control many things but they can't control his thoughts or his dreams. He takes comfort in the knowledge his imagination and mind are his and his alone to control.

He likes the library best after the gardens. It's quiet and so expansive he can lose himself in the stacks for hours at a time. Not to study necessarily, just to think and be by himself for awhile. If it doesn't exactly fool Obi Wan then at least it appeases him, makes his Master think he is staying out of trouble. What the older Jedi doesn't know won't hurt him, thinks the much chastised apprentice.

Nimble fingers fly across the HoloNet keyboard. He searches for any information he can find about current events on Naboo, on the queen and her court. Anakin doesn't use his own personal access code; he's learned his lesson with the countless lectures suffered and the hours of extra meditation meant to teach him the follies of attachments for a Jedi. Instead he uses one he 'liberated' from one of his fellow Padawans. Of late he has become more cautious about broadcasting his interest with Padme Amidala.

The scene materializes in front of him and he doesn't even try to contain the grin from spreading across his face. It's the first new image he's seen of her in two years. During the farce that was the Trade Federation trials there had been a few official holos released before Naboo had once again faded into the background but since then, nothing. This tiny blurb, already months old, is likely thought newsworthy only because of the recent attempt to have Nute Gunray and his associates brought up on new charges.

He studies the formal setting with more intensity than any boy his age should possess. It's an official celebration picture taken to commemorate her turning eighteen and also to announce her second - and last - tenure as queen. His eyes search for any signs she has changed but it is difficult to tell since she is costumed in her queenly outfit and heavy makeup. He leans a little closer to get a better look at the solemn brown eyes staring back at him.

The approaching sound of whispers and barely smothered giggles interrupts him and he pulls back quickly, turning off the computer and disappearing around the nearest stack just as two

older Twi'lek Padawans make their way past. He watches them go from the safety of his hiding place, debating whether to pull up the image again. In the end he decides against it. It is late and Obi Wan may come looking for him.

He turns to leave but his eyes automatically stray to the blank terminal as if he can still see her face etched on the reflective screen.

Eighteen to his fourteen.

It is an abstract thought. The difference in their ages is insignificant to him. He doesn't care she is older by just over four years and he never thinks the gap intimidating as most children his age would. Yet he is tongue tied around the female teenaged Padawans in the Temple, blushing and stammering when they tease him about his newest growth spurt or comment on the color of his eyes. But then, they aren't her. Padme is special. Padme is his.

The thought fills him with a fierce longing which stabs him sharply in his gut. It is always this way when he thinks of the future, when he thinks of her. He is older and his thoughts aren't as innocent as they once were.

Neither are his dreams.

Anakin's first kiss is unexpected. Lips meet and meld. It's new and exciting but at the same time it leaves him with an empty feeling. After all, he isn't kissing Padme. But he thinks maybe this is a good thing because this first kiss is awkward, not like it is in the holovids. He's not sure exactly where to put his hands and his nose keeps getting in the way. The girl's name is Nainelle, she's one of the staff at a spaceport hostel where he and Obi Wan are stranded while they await transportation back to Coruscant during a worker's strike.

He doesn't mean for it to happen. For two days he valiantly does his level best to ignore the flirtations of the black-haired girl but she is not dissuaded by his almost surly avoidance attempts. Not even Obi Wan's disapproving frowns and exasperated mutterings stay her saucy winks and infectious laughter. Her irreverence and lack of awe toward the older Jedi break down Anakin's already sagging defenses. At fourteen his body hums and pulses with youthful curiosity and a growing hunger fueled by dreams of another. By the time she lures him to the store room under some weak pretext it takes very little effort on her part to coax the inevitable response.

Yet at first he's almost angry - at this girl, at himself, even at the circumstances of his life. A sense of betrayal twists his insides as if he's somehow broken trust with Padme by kissing another. But as Nainelle presses her body more firmly against his, as he discovers she is soft in places where his body is not, it dawns on him how much he has to learn if he is to win someone like Padme. Reluctance and hesitation slide away. Suddenly he is responding with an almost frightening confidence. Nainelle is caught off guard when the boy she took for an inexperienced novice unleashes the animal within. Before she can fully credit what is happening, she finds herself pressed between the rough stone wall and his lean frame, being kissed back with mind numbing heat and a hunger to match. As his confidence grows, it is all she can do to keep the boy's hands from roaming where they shouldn't while he grinds himself against her.

Despite Obi Wan's vigilance the pair has little trouble arranging secret rendezvous over the next three days. In deserted alcoves or empty rooms, fingers slide beneath confining clothes, mouths

brush virgin skin, and Anakin experiences his first release at the hands of another. It is Nainelle's solution for she dares go no further; her future depends on her purity. But with each encounter it grows more difficult to resist. The young Jedi has but to kiss her, to use his increasingly skillful hands, and thoughts of the risks versus her future disappear in a haze of passionate lust.

When the Jedi depart, it is just in time. If they had stayed any longer, Anakin would likely have succeeded in seducing the older girl. And should he have done so, it would have had dire consequences for Nainelle. On her planet, amongst her people, virginity is a matter of family honor. It is a sacred gift meant only for the future husband. When an unmarried girl is found to be impure, immediate death is the punishment. Unbeknownst to Anakin, but hanging over Nainelle's head every moment of their time together, this is the fate which awaited her had the young lovers been given a little more time.

***"And yet forever, since time began,
Has man dared woman and woman lured man
To that sweet danger that lurks and lies
In the bloodless battle of eyes with eyes;
That reckless danger, as vast as sweet,
Whose bitter ending is joy's defeat.
Ah! thus forever, while time shall last,
On passion's altar must hearts be cast! "***

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Anakin - Age 15

His dreams - he drowns in them. Drowns in the pleasure; drowns in the radiance; drowns in the beauty. They make him clamor for something he isn't quite able to comprehend. Yet he knows he wants this nameless thing more than he's ever wanted anything in his short life. He can almost touch it, almost taste it, if only he tries hard enough he can possess it.

The dreams come in cool, compelling colors - cascading streaks of green, blue, and the softest of lavenders. They are the colors he associates with Naboo, her home.

In the hazy realm of the subconscious world, Anakin's burgeoning desires awake, leaving him restless and edgy. He tosses and turns, twisting and kicking his sheets into a tangled mess at the foot of his bunk. Everything aches: his head, his throat, his heart, his rapidly hardening body on the verge of becoming a man.

Brown pools beguile him.

Chocolate silk lures him.

He can't catch his breath in these dreams. She steals it with her beauty and he never fights her for it, gives it to her gladly. He reaches out for her but she's maddeningly elusive, dancing away from his outstretched hands time and time again. All the while her handmaiden's gently mocking laughter fills the air like the tittering of a flock of birds.

Delicate fingers turn a japor pendant end over end under his fascinated gaze.

He awakens with the phantom traces of her fragrance teasing him. The scent mingles with the rich tang of musk and sweat, creating an intoxicating perfume which permeates his small room. It makes him lightheaded, almost dizzy. The feeling leaves him hollow, jumpy and moody for days on end.

***"Dreams are true while they last,
and do we not live in dreams?"***

Alfred Lord Tennyson

Anakin - Age 16

Month after month goes by with the same dream in some variation or another returning to stir up his confusion and doubts.

Frustration feeds him. Anakin's inability to have what he most wants, even if it is only in the intangible world of sleep, is a corrosive acid in his belly. He wonders if it is a portent, a sign events have changed course, and if this somehow means Padme is no longer meant for him. If this is the case, where does this leave him?

It's too late! He wants to scream these words of protest to the universe, to the Force, to anyone who will listen. He loves her, of this he is without doubt. No one else inspires him. No one else moves him the way she does. With her he senses he could be so much more than Jedi or slave. He would give his life for hers with no hesitation. He would do anything for her, all she has to do is ask.

The only thing he knows he will never do is give her up. Not now.

Didn't he give up his mother? Why should he now have to give up Padme as well? He can't be asked to do it.

The weight of the Jedi Code chants 'Attachments are forbidden' until it's an incomprehensible drone pressing down on him. No! It's not fair! The sullen cry reverberates over and over while a roomful of wary Jedi eyes measure his worth and find him lacking.

Within he feels the paths Shmi and Padme have traced in his heart, imagines the blood rushing through the capillaries, and feels the pounding beat of his life force in his chest. His mother's love was planted at birth, had taken root immediately, had grown and blossomed over time. But the other love, the new love? It had been sudden and quick but it was no less real, and despite what the Jedi Code dictated, it lives and breathes within him. His love for Padme has roots so sturdy now, so deep, that excising them is impossible to conceive.

Shmi and Padme.

One was his past, the other is his future.

Anakin continues to brood, to fret and worry, to rage against the Force until the night comes

when his faith is restored; the night he dreams in crimson, yellow, and explosions of brilliant orange; warm, enveloping splashes of color beneath an endless blue sky.

It is this night the sixteen year old dreams for the first time when he reaches out for Padme he achieves his longed for objective, and in doing so he obliterates almost a year of stomach churning dread. To the tune of the all too familiar tinkling laughter floating on the breeze, Anakin's fingers finally close around her small hand, taking it prisoner within his warm grasp as blue eyes collide with brown.

Delicate bones and cartilage covered in soft, white flesh. Smooth, rounded nails polished to a dull gleam. He clutches on tightly. It is his reward for enduring months of agony and he is taking no chances.

Brown pools beguile him.

Chocolate silk lures him.

He doesn't notice as the carved piece of japor slips uselessly from her free hand and shatters upon the ground like the most fragile of glass; a hundred teardrops glittering in the sun.

Part Two – Falling

***"You are not wrong, who deem
That my days have been a dream;
Yet, if Hope has flown away
In a night, or in a day,
In a vision, or in none,
Is it, therefore, the less gone?
All that we see or seem
Is but a dream within a dream."***

Edgar Allen Poe

Anakin - Ages 16 - 19

Anakin embraces the Force and it embraces him like a mother or a lover. It flows as naturally through him as his own blood surges through his veins. The mystical energy is a part of him, has been a part of him from the moment he was conceived, and its use is second nature to him. It's instinctual, like breathing or thinking. It's a constant presence and he can no more shake it than he can his own shadow.

His arrogance comes out. He knows he's better. The urge to prove himself is strong and he chafes against the Padawan shackles enforced upon him by the Order. Often he reacts before he thinks, considers analyzing the problem a waste of time. He is impatient and easily provoked. Anakin has the disease of youth; not only does he think he knows everything but he also believes he knows better than both his peers and his elders. He simply doesn't understand the old guards' reluctance to try out new ideas and strategies. It is incomprehensible to him how they can stomach just standing around and waiting when they could be doing something. Action

is preferable to discussion and he is never able to suppress his impatient fidgeting should the bureaucratic sessions go on for what he deems too long.

A sympathetic ear is found in the man who befriended him after the Battle of Naboo. A flush of pride never fails to suffuse Anakin at how he has been singled out by the Supreme Chancellor for special attention. Palpatine makes it clear he believes and trusts in the often chastised Padawan and Anakin, starved for attention and approval, basks in the scraps he is thrown by his benevolent mentor. It is not long before the young Jedi finds himself seeing the state of the galaxy more and more through the eyes of the older man. Palpatine has an uncanny way of turning a problem around and making Anakin see it from a different point of view, one the youth hasn't been able to appreciate before.

It is a situation which makes Obi Wan vaguely uneasy, but then, he never did care for politicians.

There have been many girls to kiss since Nainelle, all with dark eyes and hair. Anakin gravitates towards those resembling the two most important feminine influences in his life. He is lured to them like the proverbial glowmoth to the flame. The boy still lurking within is constantly seeking out the symbolic home he forfeited to become a Jedi; while the burgeoning man, the increasingly dominant side, is drawn to these substitutes to alleviate the gaping void of loneliness that is his constant companion. For a short span of time they fill the hollowness inside him, they appease the ache for physical affection.

With his standoffish air and his handsome good looks he attracts the notice of the more daring females at the Temple. The attention is unwanted. Anakin is not inclined to play the flirtatious games the other Padawans engage in. He has his mind on the future and he instinctively knows involving himself with those he lives and works with is a bad idea - even with the freedom afforded by not having to worry about the forming of emotional attachments. With his eye on the future, he always makes sure to seek his experiences outside the confines of the Temple walls.

Inevitably, the more he experiments the more he realizes he needs to learn. The day it occurs to him perhaps somewhere out there Padme may also be stretching her own wings, fills him with such white-hot jealousy he can't contain himself. For the first time ever, he beats Obi Wan during lightsaber practice. For his troubles, for using aggression and anger instead of pure skill and reason, he is given thirty circuits and is banned from dueling with anyone but Obi Wan until further notice.

The lower levels draw him down. They call to him like a long lost friend. Obi Wan disapproves of his pastime, a circumstance which hardly proves a deterrent. Anything his Master frowns upon only tends to ensure Anakin pursues it with double the enthusiasm.

Anakin likes to wander the crowded, dank streets, investigate the seedy shops and explore the gaming dens where the spacers congregate. There is a certain comfort to be found in the places of ill repute for a young man who spent his formative years, first in the possession of the Hutts and then in the mean, cramped slave quarters of Mos Espa. Coruscant's architecture is more sophisticated, the technology better, the climate far more temperate and hospitable, but the people and their vices are the same. Spice runners, thieves, slavers, gamblers, pleasure givers

and the like, they all make their home and earn their livelihoods down in the lower levels. Anakin feels more at home there amongst the outsiders, the rejects and misfits, than he does among the top dwellers.

Among the twisted, narrow alleyways off the main streets scavengers roam and Anakin moves with confidence and ease. A thousand eyes peer at him from their hidden nooks and crannies, leery of the stranger in their midst but on guard for any opportunity to make a quick credit or two. It doesn't take long for them to learn not to bother the tall figure who strides purposefully through their territory as if he were born there.

In the warren of the lower levels he loses himself in the anonymity of the masses of lost souls. He lets himself forget he's a Jedi and allows himself to just become Anakin. In the clubs and gaming halls he develops transient friendships, connections; a secret life where for brief spans of time he escapes the rigid confines of the Jedi.

It is lonely being The Chosen One.

Anakin is an oddity in the Order. He's the only one at the Temple with memories of a mother. He's the only one who fights the constant worry for a loved one's safety.

What is most troublesome to the young man, what plagues him with guilt, is the way memories of home are fading and blurring around the edges as each year slips by. Shmi's face, once as familiar to him as his own, is now hazy and indistinct and, more often than not, he sees the image of another in his dreams. However his love for his mother remains as strong and fierce as the day he left her. Very soon, he promises himself, he will go back to Tatooine to fetch her. He is certain this will happen. Just as he is certain, in the not so distant future, Padme will be his.

Anakin fantasizes about Padme constantly. He imagines what the texture of her skin will feel like, what it will look like in the morning sun or in the moonlight. Tracing Laaran's collarbone with his lips, he wonders how Padme's skin will taste, how soft it will be beneath his fingertips. Will she like a gentle touch or will she respond to a more masterful possession? Hours upon hours are spent planning out how he will explore every slope and hollow, every curve with his mouth and hands. Every detail is agonized over as his anticipation builds and his obsession grows.

Everything he does is with Padme in mind. When he buries his hands in Ara's thick tresses, as she takes his length deep in her mouth, he remembers silky brown curls lightly scented with an exotic mix of flowers and vanilla. The pleasure giver on Alderaan, a petite brunette with light brown eyes, shows him how to use his tongue and fingers between her thighs and he hungers to know how sweet Padme will be upon his tongue when he sips her release. When he learns the erotic art of pleasure-pain from Dessa, wife of the senator from Kuat, when she teaches him the delights of using more forcefulness during foreplay and coupling, as she takes his virginity, he wonders if he will be in time to receive the same gift from Padme. Anakin does not care to imagine otherwise.

His confidence builds as he becomes skilled in the arts of love and seduction. The women in between are but practice for the ultimate conquest. His crooked smile and slumberous eyes lure

them in and he perfects the use of the shy, innocent boy act. Many court-weary ladies, thinking they are the ones in control, find out how wrong they are. This young man, barely more than a boy, pulls the strings and unless they wish to forfeit their brief time with him, they quickly learn to play by his rules.

***"Lady you bereft me of all words,
Only my blood speaks to you in my veins,
And there is such confusion in my powers."***

William Shakespeare

Anakin - Age 20

Absolutely nothing goes as he planned. He fumbles his words, turns into a gangly awkward adolescent in the face of her poised beauty. Every attempt to impress turns into a humiliating defeat. Misery plunges its vibroblade into his gut even as his love and desire burn steady and bright within the prison of his heart. His fingers itch to touch, to explore but he is just her protector, and he has no right to breach the distance the past ten years worked to build. They are no longer children afforded familiarity by their innocence. Now protocol and all it entails must be observed.

Anakin devours her with his eyes, feasts on her whenever she is within his sight. He cannot stop looking at her. It has been ten long years in the desert and she is like cool spring water to his parched throat. He revels in her sweet scent, almost content to breathe the same air as she, but not quite. He wants more and he is determined to have it. Anakin burns for Padme and he will not settle for anything less than all of her.

Duty, responsibility, obligation, commitment - the hated words spill from Padme, each a heavy stone attempting to crush his dream into oblivion. He listens without hearing, acquiesces without accepting. The Jedi teach that while a battle may be lost, the war may still be won. This is one lesson with which Anakin finds himself in complete agreement and he strategically retreats to plan a way around her defenses.

Across the room, far from the warmth of the fire, Anakin reflects on how sweet her lips tasted, the welcome weight of her body pressing down atop his, the silk of her skin beneath his fingers, and he knows nothing will stop him from finding a way - absolutely nothing.

He dreams about sand of all things, endless piles of sand, shifting and changing shape as the wind picks up speed and sculpts new configurations into the dunes. Gritty grains roll and tumble in an effort to fill in the tracks left by some hapless wanderer, yet the imprints never quite seem to disappear from sight. The phantom footprints lead off into the desert where the belligerent cries of the sand people echo endlessly on the howling wind. From somewhere behind him he thinks he can hear Jira, her voice cracking with age.

"There's a storm coming, Ani." The simple cautionary words fill him with a nameless fear which

chills him to the core despite the heat of the twin suns.

Then he is flying across the dunes, flying faster than he ever did in his pod racer, his heart trying its best to fling itself out of his chest. . The panicked thumping beats out his terror for the universe to hear.

He sees her, sees his mother. For the first time in a long time her image is sharp and focused. Shmi's eyes are black with pain. Her body writhes in agony as a bloody rain begins to fall.

"I'm so proud of you, Ani." She whispers. And he can hear the death rattle from deep in her chest.

He awakes abruptly, steeped in the stink of sweat and fear.

Shmi dies in her son's arms.

Anakin cradles her as she takes her last breath. He barely recognizes her. Her now frail body has been decimated. Dried, crusted blood and streaks of dirt, bruises and hideous swellings, all have turned her features into a parody of a human face. It nearly kills him to know there isn't a thing he can do to save her. The Chosen One is useless, helpless, he is nothing. All the powers of the Force and he couldn't reach her in time. He couldn't ease her pain or stop her from suffering. He failed to protect his own mother from these savage...animals. His mind spits the last word contemptuously as hate fills his heart. Rocking her in his arms, he can feel broken bones move and shift beneath fragile skin and layers of ragged, dirty clothing. The simmering rage shoots upward and out, and he glories in it; gives into it, lets it explode with all the destructive force the dark side holds. It brings him to his feet with startling speed and murderous intent. Anakin erupts out of the crude hut with his lightsaber blazing, his mind focused on only one thing - revenge.

The quiet desert night is rent with screams of terror and grunts of pain. The pleasing odor of cooking fires is soon overshadowed by the smell of charred flesh and the coppery tang of blood rises up to taint the cool breeze. No one in the Tusken camp is spared. These are the beasts that tortured and murdered his mother. They deserve no pity, no compassion. He is a righteous avenger, unstoppable in his fatal fury. Raw power thrums inside of him. It courses through his body, electric and alive. It is more power than he's ever known, and he uses it to wreak his personal vengeance.

One last keening wail drifts away into silence as the desert drinks its bloody tears.

The Clone Wars

***"Over the din of battle,
Over the cannons' rattle,
Over the strident voices of men and their dying groans,
I hear the falling of thrones."***

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Anakin - Age 22

When he is parted from Padme he longs for the times when they can be together, the nights when they may share the same bed. He craves the intimacy like an addict craves spice. Entwined in the darkness, her flesh pressed against his, the scent of their lovemaking thick in the air, it is the only place he feels safe, warm, protected...loved.

No matter how exhausted he is, no matter what his mood, Anakin remains awake on these nights. It is there he renews his soul, it is there his belief in the good and rightness of the universe is reborn. In the shadows of their apartment bedroom, the only place he's truly considered home since leaving Tatooine, he marvels at the beauty and wonder of Padme, his forbidden wife. In her smooth creamy skin, the soft dips and curves of her body, he forgets the ugliness and horror of the battlefields. In her thick mane of chocolate curls scented with the flowers of Naboo, he forces away the stench of blood and death, the odor of rotting corpses and scorched flesh; all the fragrances of war. Listening to her steady, soft breathing he buries the memory of the screams of the dying, the sound of destroyers ripping apart at their seams. At Padme's side he finds the comforting security his heart cries out for when he is courting death among the stars.

In lieu of sleep, he keeps constant vigil throughout the night, murmuring sweet words of want, love and need against her bare skin. Only then is he able to admit to the things he doesn't dare say while she's awake. In the safety of the blackening night he tells her about the destructive winds which ceaselessly carve away at the empty place inside him. He whispers that only she fills up that empty void. Only she makes him whole. If he loses her, he will be as good as lost too. Tightening his hold, he vows he won't ever let her go.

Fitted together, back to front, one possessive leg thrown over both of hers, his flesh hand ritually wanders her sleep warmed form, memorizing anew every indentation, every swell before finally coming to rest above her beating heart. Sacrament performed, Anakin tries his best to forget the terrible truth. But the darkness mocks him with it anyway - the 'Hero with No Fear' is just a pathetic myth.

If heroes do exist, Anakin knows he isn't one of them.

***"The place is very well and quiet
and the children only scream in a low voice."***

Lord Byron

Anakin - Age 23

Everything he is, everything he does, it's all for her. It always has been. He lives for her. He breathes for her. He fights for her. And now, at last, he murders for her.

The Emperor, his new Master, legitimizes his actions; cleanses them, sanitizes them with a politician's spin and a Sith's skill for deceit. When Anakin takes the last step, he makes his choice. It's a decision which forever alters his path and ultimately decimates everyone he loves and everything he believes in.

He fails with the best of intentions.

So it is in the end that Anakin plays the gardener within the walls of the Temple one last time. Every Jedi is a weed to be ruthlessly dealt with and he rips the traitors up by their roots with cold blooded efficiency, discarding them as insignificant rubbish to make way for the seedlings of the new Empire. As he cuts a swath through his former home, as he hones his skills in the art of betrayal, as his lightsaber sizzles through flesh and bone, he only thinks one thought.

Padme.

There will be no more hiding, no more clandestine meetings, no more secrets. Everyone will soon know Padme is his. She will be safe from the nightmares plaguing him; safe because of what he is doing in the Temple this night. So many deaths. And they are all in exchange for the life of his most cherished possession. The transgressions he commits against his brethren are the currency he uses to buy her life. She can't escape him, not as he somehow always feared she might; slipping away like a wraith into the shadows. No one, not even death, will take her from him. After this night she is bound to him by more than words of love, by more than the child growing in her womb, now she is bound to him by the blood on his hands.

Now, he owns her.

The fire burns. The Jedi fall. The Republic crumbles. And far, far above the din created by the clone troopers sweeping through the Temple on their march of death, the still air is marred only by the sound of a soul breaking as the younglings fall one by one beneath his unhesitating blade.

There is no mercy. Anakin can afford none. It is their lives for hers.

***"The devil hath power
To assume a pleasing shape."***

William Shakespeare

Padme - Age 27

Assassination attempt. Betrayal by the Jedi. Treasonous plots.

It is unbelievable, inconceivable, yet it is Anakin relating this information and he wouldn't lie to her, he couldn't. Her mind spins and dips, unable or unwilling to grasp how, in the space of a day everything has changed so drastically. Still reeling, she is ill-prepared for the shock of Anakin advising her she must distance herself from her friends in the Senate, avoid all appearances of disloyalty. The warning is delivered with a patronizing smile and a lover's caress - both of which only add to the sinister air, making the vague threat all the more chilling because it comes from the lips of her own husband.

In that instant, Padme isn't just afraid; she's terrified - for the baby, for Anakin, for her family, for her world as she's known it, and yes, for herself. There is a sick feeling rising from deep down inside her, a black tide of darkness enveloping her heart. It is the height of summer but she feels

an icy tide freezing the blood in her veins and she cannot stop shivering from the encroaching cold.

Anakin has changed. In a matter of hours he has undergone some type of alteration. He looks the same to the naked eye but it's there nonetheless. She sees it lurking in the back of his eyes, she hears it in the timber of his voice, she feels it in his touch as his palm caresses her cheek, she smells it beneath the perfume of smoke and sweat permeating his clothing - a cold, sly ruthlessness never there before.

An inner voice whispers to her, its breath foul and rotten. It slithers and hisses up her spine, warning her something is wrong, something isn't quite right in all Anakin is telling her. Common sense and practicality, years of political and diplomatic experience, scream to be heard but, for once, she refuses to listen. Instead, guilt raises its voice and drowns out reason - the guilt she's been harboring for keeping secrets from Anakin and for trusting Obi Wan before him. Violently, blindly, Padme shunts all else aside while a part of her simply shuts down. She doesn't have the will or energy to examine the situation too closely. She dares not. She will believe in Anakin, in her husband, in her one and only lover, in the father of her child. Padme will do this because she loves him; she loves him and she is too afraid to look beyond that love. She is too terrified of the darkness she sees hovering behind his blue eyes.

A helpless voice inside her head, one that sounds far too young and pathetic for a woman who once was queen, whispers, "He will come back to you, he will."

Shame at her weakness lingers in the back of her mouth like cold ashes. Telling herself nothing else matters, willing herself to believe it despite the dread descending like a moon eclipsing the sun, she stands amidst the falling debris of the Republic and desperately embraces the stranger who wears Anakin's face and speaks in his voice.

What other choice does she have?

Padme clings to one belief above all others. Anakin is a good man and he would never turn from what is right and true, he would never betray her and her beliefs. He wouldn't forfeit everything they have fought and worked so hard for - never. To believe anything else is simply...unimaginable.

**"Love is my religion
And I could die for that.
I could die for you."**

John Keats

Anakin - Age 23

Padme is waiting for him, as she always is, as she always will be - as she is meant to. He thinks he has never seen her look so pale and frightened, so devastatingly beautiful. She is his most precious jewel - bought and paid for with innocent lives, with the forfeit of his very soul. He would do it a hundred times over. There is no price too high to pay to keep her safe.

Anakin laces his words with subtle insinuations, cautions Padme to avoid her friends in the

Senate and to be careful of future improprieties. He doesn't realize how menacing he sounds - despite the gentle smile on his face and the way he tenderly tucks a stray piece of hair behind her ear as he delivers his carefully worded threat. The air of sweet vulnerability she exudes intoxicates him, it fills his senses like the heady fumes from the most expensive of wines. As always, Padme utterly entrances him. The trembles coursing through her small frame, the ones she cannot quite suppress, please him for some unaccountable reason. The fearful uncertainty, the tears shimmering in her brown eyes arouse him. As he holds her in his arms he thinks he should have thrown off the fetters placed on him by the Jedi long ago.

Anakin strokes the flesh of Padme's slender throat with a possessive, knowing hand, his gloved finger rising to catch her tears as they paint her cheeks. The clear drops are sweet on the tip of his tongue - as sweet as his impending victory over the Separatists. She is afraid for him and his mouth closes over hers to greedily drink her terror, his tongue laps up her desperate little sobs with seductive strokes. What is left of Anakin attempts to soothe her, even as the darkness feeds off of her fright.

Gathering Padme closer, triumph rushes through his body and fans the flames of the dark power smoldering inside. He has banished his fear. He holds the reins; he's the one in control now. From this day forward she will listen to him; she will follow where he leads. No more defiance. No more arguing. And, more importantly, there will be no more risking her life for causes and people who don't deserve it. She'll always be where he knows she is safe. Guarded and protected; kept away from any who would do her harm. She is his and his alone.

Padme will have no choice but to listen to him. She will do so because it is he who keeps her and their child safe. She will soon come to realize what he has done, what he will do, is for the good of everyone. And if he has to, he will make her understand.

Anakin clings to one belief above all others. Padme is loyal and she would never turn from him, never betray him or their love. She is the one person he can always trust. To believe anything else is simply...unimaginable.

Part Three - Drowning

Epilogue

***"With my back to a record of error
And the highway of sin I have trod,
There come to me shapes I would banish--
The shapes of the deeds I have done;
And I pray and I plead till they vanish--
All vanish and leave me, save one."***

Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Lord Vader - Age 23 - 41

His dreams - he drowns in them. Drowns in the horror; drowns in the pain; drowns beneath the

endless waves of sorrow, guilt and rage. They mock him; cruelly reminding him of what was and what will never be again. Bitter recriminations and impotent fury feed him. For in the shadow realm she haunts him. There he can almost touch her, almost taste her, yet he knows no matter how hard he tries he will never again possess her. Unlike before, she is no longer out there just waiting for him to claim her the second he is old enough. Now there is only a black void where once her Force signature shone as fierce as the twin suns from his homeworld.

Vader's subconscious is a yawning chasm of regret, a vivid tapestry of anger and pain, and for this, in his waking time; the rest of the galaxy is made to pay. He makes rulers bow before him, he brings entire systems to their knees, and every man, woman and child; every sentient creature alive trembles in his presence. The power and fear he wields are all he has left and he exercises them to their fullest extent. But there aren't enough screams or enough blood in all the star systems combined to ease the endless rage and anguish eating him from the inside out.

And his dreams...they lie in constant wait.

There are some nights when they come to him in the familiar ravaging colors of destruction and death - scarlet splashes of red, molten yellow and gray smeared across a canvas of pitch black. They hum and throb with a gleeful malevolence, shimmering in the wretched, poisoned heat. The colors pant and breathe; living entities intent on devouring everything in their wake. They growl and bellow, snarl and snap, like ravenous krayt dragons never appeased.

"It seems in your anger, you killed her." His Master's voice sings with false sympathy and mocking regret.

He hears the hideous words sounding over and over - a litany, a curse upon his soul for all eternity. Shards of excruciating pain blossom and explode within his chest. He lashes out, kicks and screams. No one hears him. There is no one left. He made sure of that.

On other nights the dreams seep up from the darkest depths of all the hells, showing themselves to him in varying hues of blue and brown; rich chocolate brown flecked with spangled white. These are the worst. It is these nightmarish scenes which draw from him the rivulets of sweat which soak through his leather and sting his fire scarred skin. The dreaded apparitions rip hoarse, disjointed gasps from his ruined lungs, setting off a cacophony of screams ricocheting inside his head. His internal cries bash endlessly against the confines of his skull - trapped like his body in its black metal shell.

It is on these nights he kills her all over again.

He steals her breath in these dreams, reaching out with his leather gloved hand, mechanical fingers clenching in a fist of death. She fights for it, she begs with disbelieving eyes, but he is too blinded by thoughts of her perceived betrayal, by his lust for power and glory, and she collapses before him again -

And again.

And again.

And then she is drowning; drowning in all the shades of blue, submerged in them, carried away by the dragging currents. Floating. Sinking. Brown strands of hair frame a pale, beautiful face. They curl and writhe in the creeping tide. White flowers glide past, snagging in the thick tangles

like stars caught in wet chocolate silk.

Delicate fingers turn a japori pendant end over end under his fascinated gaze.

Enfolded hands, stiff and white, clasp a silver chained piece of japori - a gift given with innocence and love in a different life. Those once expressive hands stilled forever - resting atop the swell where the never to be born child lays.

It is a horrifyingly beautiful frozen tableau.

Padme.

His love.

His obsession.

His masterpiece of death.

The beauty, the horror, the past, and the future - the visions ensnare him, pulling him down into a hell of his own making; a hell where a pair of wounded brown eyes forever beg, forever weep, forever grow dimmer until there is no more light. And he is left alone in the dark to dream the hideous scenes from a life long gone.

His dreams - he drowns in them.

He always has.

He fears he always will.

The End

If you liked the story, I'd really love to hear your thoughts/comments. Feedback is always much appreciated. Thanks for reading. Keep fan fic alive!